

Reader's
Digest

The Complete Illustrated Book of Herbs



Growing • Health & Beauty • Cooking • Crafts



Medicinal preparations

It's rewarding to make your own herbal medicines. Follow these step-by-step instructions to ensure you achieve the best results.

Infusions, decoctions, tinctures and syrups can all be prepared for internal use, while infused oils, compresses or poultices are more appropriate for topical applications. Some active constituents in herbs are readily soluble in water, while others require a more vigorous extraction process that involves alcohol.

Infusions

The word 'infusion' is used to describe a herbal tea or tisane that is made by pouring boiling water over a quantity of fresh or dried herbal material. Every time you make a cup of tea with a tea bag, you are, in fact, making an infusion.

An infusion is an effective preparation method for delicate or fine plant parts, such as petals, leaves and other aerial parts. It is ideally suited to extracting water-soluble components from the plant and is often used for aromatic herbs that contain essential oils (such as peppermint, fennel and chamomile).

- 1 Place the recommended quantity of loose dried herb (dried chamomile is used here) or finely chopped fresh herb into a pre-warmed glass or china teapot or coffee plunger.
- 2 Pour about 200 ml freshly boiled water over the herb and stir. Place the lid on the teapot to trap the steam and prevent the essential oil evaporating. Allow the mixture to steep for 10 to 15 minutes.
- 3 Stir again before pouring through a strainer into your teacup.

Usage Drink one cup of tea three times a day over several weeks for chronic (long-standing) problems, or up to six cups a day in the shorter term for acute problems.

Storage Infusions do not store well, so it's always best to prepare a fresh pot of tea for each cup.





Decoctions

A decoction is a herbal tea made by boiling a herb in water. This method is most suitable for the woodier parts of a plant — such as the bark, roots, twigs and seeds — and is used to extract as many of the water-soluble active constituents as possible.

- 1 Grind the required quantity of dried herb (dried dandelion root is used here) into a coarse powder.
- 2 In a saucepan, cover the powder with about 500 ml cold (not hot) water; stir. Bring water slowly to the boil. Reduce heat to low and, with the lid still on, simmer for 10 to 15 minutes. (If your stove-top doesn't have a sufficiently low heat setting, use a double boiler.)

- 3 Stir again before pouring through a strainer into a teacup.

Usage Drink one cup three times a day over several weeks for chronic (long-standing) problems, or up to six cups a day in the shorter term for acute ones.

Storage Decoctions keep for a maximum of 3 days in the refrigerator. If you have the time, it's preferable to make a fresh decoction for each dose.



Chinese decoctions

Decoctions are revered by Chinese herbalists for their therapeutic effects and their versatility. They enable the herbalist to tailor remedies to the patient's needs, and allow the treatment to be amended as the patient's condition changes in response to the medicine.

The Chinese herbalist or pharmacist consults with the patient and determines the appropriate remedies to include in the prescription — the number of herbal ingredients (and their doses) is often larger than those used by Western herbalists.

Each daily dose of herbs is dispensed into a separate bag for the patient to prepare at home. The amount of water required, the boiling time and the quantity and frequency of medicine to be consumed may all vary.

Traditionally, ceramic clay pots with lids are used for Chinese decoctions, as chemical interactions can occur when herbs are exposed to metals such as aluminium, copper or iron.

Body scrubs and splashes

Body scrubs and polishes work wonders on rough, dehydrated skin. Scrubbing whisks dead, dull cells away, resulting in brighter, more radiant skin. It also improves the skin's absorption of other products, such as moisturisers and oils, so that they can produce more noticeable results. Many conventional products harbour artificial and unappealing ingredients; fortunately, natural formulas containing herbal essences, crushed nuts, sugar and even coffee grounds work just as well.

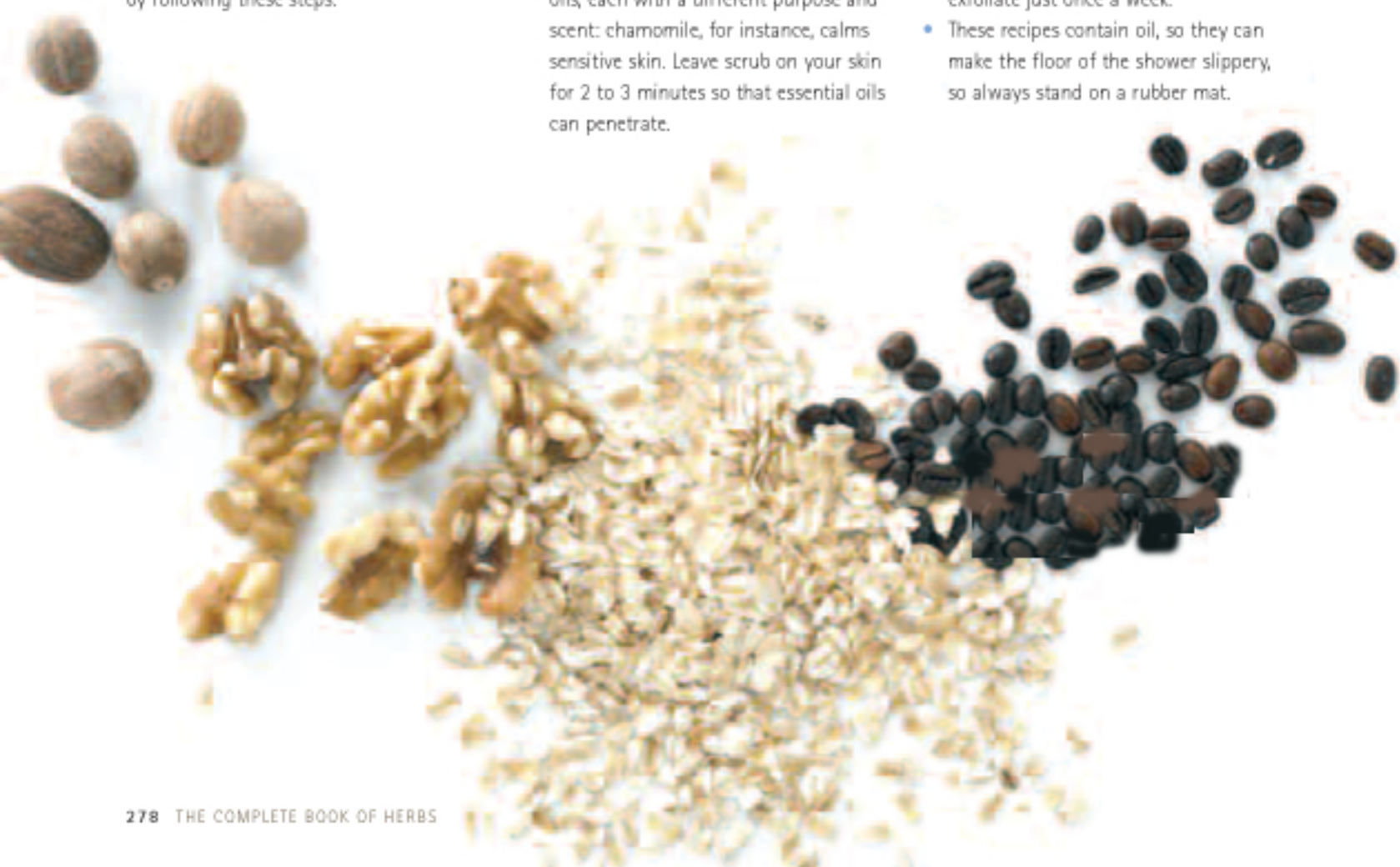
Smooth and glow

Every day the epidermis (the outermost layer of the skin) sheds millions of dead cells. The rate at which your body renews its skin slows as you get older, however, so exfoliation (scrubbing) becomes increasingly important for maintaining healthy, youthful skin. Scrubbing also helps loosen ingrown hairs, stimulate circulation and lift away dirt and sebum without the use of potentially drying soaps. Get the most benefit out of your homemade herbal body scrub or polish by following these steps.

- Cleanse your body as usual before scrubbing, but hold off on shaving until another time, as scrubs may aggravate newly shaved skin.
- Linger in the bath or shower to soften your skin before attacking tough spots with your scrub. Use more scrub on your knees, heels and elbows.
- Massage scrub into damp skin with circular motions, working your way up from your feet to your heart; avoid your genitals and nipples.
- These scrub recipes contain essential oils, each with a different purpose and scent: chamomile, for instance, calms sensitive skin. Leave scrub on your skin for 2 to 3 minutes so that essential oils can penetrate.
- If you have delicate or acne-prone skin, use scrubs with caution, as scrubbing can actually spread breakouts and irritate sensitive skin. Start with gentle pressure, avoid scrubbing if you experience any discomfort, and exfoliate just once a week.
- These recipes contain oil, so they can make the floor of the shower slippery, so always stand on a rubber mat.

Splish, splash!

Body splashes are lightly scented toners that hydrate the skin, balance the pH level and remove excess perspiration and oil. Depending on the essential oils and herbs you use, body splashes have the power to heal skin and to energise you or calm you down. To use, spray all over body after bathing; let skin air-dry. Refrigerate between uses.



Spicy body scrub

This skin-softening blend combines coffee, known for its toning and stimulating properties, with the sweet, uplifting scent of cinnamon. The coffee grounds exfoliate skin, while the oil from the peanut butter moisturises it.

- 1 tablespoon used coffee grounds
- 3 tablespoons crunchy peanut butter
- 1 teaspoon wheatgerm oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon powdered cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon powdered nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon powdered ginger
- 5 drops cedarwood essential oil

- 1 Place all ingredients in a bowl; mix to form a gritty paste.
- 2 To use, stand in the shower and massage handfuls of paste into wet skin. Rinse off and pat dry.

Orange body polish

The fruit acids in the orange juice and the lactic acid in the yogurt remove dead cells. These acids gradually stimulate growth of collagen and possibly elastin (proteins and fibres in the skin that tend to break down over time). Sea salt is healing to the skin when used with care, but it can sting and irritate sensitive, fair, mature or sunburned skin. If you have any concerns, substitute raw sugar for the sea salt.

- 1 orange
- 2 tablespoons fine sea salt
- 3 tablespoons plain yogurt
- 1 teaspoon almond oil
- 5 drops lemon essential oil
- rice flour, sufficient to make a paste

- 1 Cut the orange in half; juice one half, and set the other aside.
- 2 Combine orange juice, salt, yogurt, oil and essential oil; mix well. Add a little rice flour to thicken and form a workable paste.
- 3 To apply treatment, first rub the exposed side of the cut half of the orange over knees, elbows, heels and other rough spots. Then massage in the salt mixture to remove dead skin. Rinse off and pat dry.

Patchouli

Patchouli essential oil is distilled from the dried branches of the bushy patchouli tree, a member of the lavender family. In Victorian England, there was a craze for wearing Bengali cashmere shawls that were packed in chests with patchouli leaves to deter moths. The patchouli-scented shawls eventually created a demand for the perfume itself.



Gentle walnut scrub

Rich in skin-softening essential fatty acids, walnut is an extra-gentle exfoliant, while oats contain beta-glucan, a soluble fibre that creates a thin, moisture-retaining film on the skin's surface.

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (60 g) shelled walnut pieces
- 2 tablespoons rolled oats
- 1 small avocado, stoned, peeled and chopped
- 1 teaspoon avocado oil
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 5 drops geranium essential oil
- 5 drops chamomile essential oil

- 1 Place walnuts and oats in the bowl of a food processor; blend at slow speed to create a fine-textured powder.
- 2 Add avocado, avocado oil and honey; process again briefly to form a workable paste. Add the essential oils, and mix well.
- 3 To use, stand in the shower and massage the mixture into skin. Rinse off and pat dry.



Citrus zinger

A refreshing, clean blend that is wonderful to use chilled in the warmer months.

- juice of $\frac{1}{2}$ lemon, strained
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 ml) witch hazel
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 ml) distilled water
- 10 drops neroli essential oil
- 5 drops lemon essential oil
- 5 drops grapefruit essential oil

Combine all ingredients in glass spritzer bottle. Shake well before use.

Softly, softly splash

The soothing, relaxing aroma and the softening properties of aloe vera and marshmallow make this perfect for skin that tends to be dry.

- 1 tablespoon dried marshmallow root
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (60 ml) apple cider vinegar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 ml) distilled water
- 2 tablespoons aloe vera juice
- 1 tablespoon vegetable glycerine
- 10 drops rose essential oil
- 5 drops sandalwood essential oil
- 5 drops patchouli essential oil

- 1 Chop marshmallow root and place in a glass jar with vinegar; seal securely. Steep for 10 days.
- 2 Strain liquid through muslin into a glass spritzer bottle.
- 3 Add water, aloe vera juice, glycerine and the essential oils. Shake well before use.

The pelargonium produces an essential oil that helps balance oil production in the skin.

Rosemary focaccia

The dough for this Italian flatbread is enriched with olive oil.

Brush with olive oil and top with herbs, olives or salt before baking.



Try this, too...

Eat focaccia just as it is, or split it and toast or grill it for sandwiches. For a quick pizza, pan-fry on the cut side. Top with hot roasted vegetables and grated cheddar or parmesan or thinly sliced mozzarella. Sprinkle with fresh basil leaves.

- 7 g (1 packet) dried yeast
- pinch of sugar
- 150 ml lukewarm water
- 1½ cups (185 g) plain flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary leaves
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, extra
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary leaves, extra
- 1 teaspoon sea salt

- 1 Mix yeast and sugar with 2 tablespoons lukewarm water. Stir in remaining water; stand 10 minutes.
- 2 In large bowl, mix flour, salt, olive oil, rosemary and yeast until well combined.
- 3 Turn out dough onto lightly floured surface; knead lightly, about 5 minutes.
- 4 Replace dough into lightly greased bowl. Cover with clean tea towel and leave to rise in warm place about 45 minutes, or until doubled in size.
- 5 Preheat oven to 200°C. Turn out dough onto lightly floured surface; knead lightly a further 2 minutes. Shape dough into a ball; lightly press down to make disc about 2 cm thick.
- 6 Place disc on oven tray; brush with extra oil and sprinkle with extra rosemary and sea salt. Bake about 20 minutes, or until well risen and golden.

MAKES 1 LOAF

Preparation 15 minutes plus

55 minutes standing

Cooking 20 minutes

Sage and prosciutto damper

Traditionally a very basic bread cooked in the hot ashes of an open fire in outback Australia, our modern version has gourmet touches.

50 g prosciutto, roughly chopped
2 cups (250 g) self-raising flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
50 g fetta, crumbled
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh sage leaves
1 cup (250 ml) milk
1 tablespoon milk, extra

- 1 Preheat oven to 220°C. Cook prosciutto in dry frying pan on medium heat, stirring until browned and slightly crisp. Drain on paper towel; cool.
- 2 Sift flour, baking powder and salt into large bowl. Add cooked prosciutto and remaining ingredients; mix together until well combined.
- 3 Turn out dough onto lightly floured surface; knead lightly about 1 minute. Shape dough into ball and flatten slightly. Using sharp knife, cut a cross on surface of dough, about 2 cm deep.
- 4 Place dough on oven tray; brush with extra milk. Bake 25 to 30 minutes, or until golden.

MAKES 1 LOAF

Preparation 15 minutes

Cooking 30 minutes



Ingredient guide

Prosciutto is a type of Italian ham that has been seasoned, salt-cured and air-dried. You can buy it thinly sliced from delicatessens and supermarkets. As an alternative, use thinly sliced pancetta, ham or bacon.